

It takes a village

Razia Jan continues drive to educate girls in Afghanistan

By Sarie Booy

Clipper Contributor

When Razia Jan was a young woman in Afghanistan, she rode a bicycle, felt the breeze in her hair (no burqas for her), went to school locally and then went on to college in the United States. Freedom was real for her.

"I was absolutely free when I was a young woman and I had the same rights as my brothers," said Jan.

She came alone to study in America at age 26, and could not go back to Afghanistan for 38 years because of the Russian invasion, then civil war and finally the oppression of the Taliban.

Jan didn't go back to visit her homeland until 2002. "After 9/11/2001, everyone was running away from Afghanistan...I wanted to be a PERSON...a leader that runs toward problems not away from them," she explained.

What Razia saw in 2002 was total intimidation of the Afghan women and girls. In the years she was in America – starting and running a successful tailoring business in Duxbury – the status of Afghan women had deteriorated to virtually uneducated house slaves. That 2002 trip inspired and ignited a powerful drive in her; she was going to set up a school for girls.

Jan set up the Razia's Ray of Hope Foundation and recruited endless support from her adopted village in Massachusetts through the Duxbury Rotary Club and began the long process of building a school for girls as well as building relationships with a suspicious village in Afghanistan, building brick and mortar space, building relationships with donors. She did her



Sarah Moran and Evelyn Dunbar shop at the Afghan bazaar that comes with any visit from Razia Jan.



Razia Jan receives a check from Stephen Dubuque, president of the Duxbury Rotary Club for her Zabuli Education Center.

work so well that she was honored as a CNN HERO. (CNN recognizes everyday people around the world who are doing extraordinary things.) All Jan's fame and fortune goes back into the Zabuli Education Center, which provides excellent and free education for more than 500 Afghan girls.

Out of this remarkable second career came the documentary film, "What Tomorrow Brings," a very intimate look into the lives of the students, teachers, village elders, parents and Razia, herself. Recently shown at the Duxbury Performing Arts Center, "What Tomorrow Brings" is slated to be shown at the Human Rights Festival at The Hague, Holland, next year.

"My focus is on THIS school...these girls will be the new leaders of Afghanistan," said Jan.

And what about the future? Razia is focused on her school, but her concern now lies with the United States and its current election.

“This presidential election is so important, not just for Americans,” she said. “The whole world looks up to America.”



Razia's Helpers from the South Shore Charter Public School in Norwell. (L to R) Blake Hern, Joe Ciambriello, Molly Sullivan, Logan MacDonald and Razia Jan. Photos by Sarie Booy

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